

How to Organise A Covid Safe event

I have been organising monthly in-person covid safe events in Berlin for 15-20 people over the last 6 months.

This is what I have learned so far.

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Why Meet In Person At All?

Joy as a form of activism

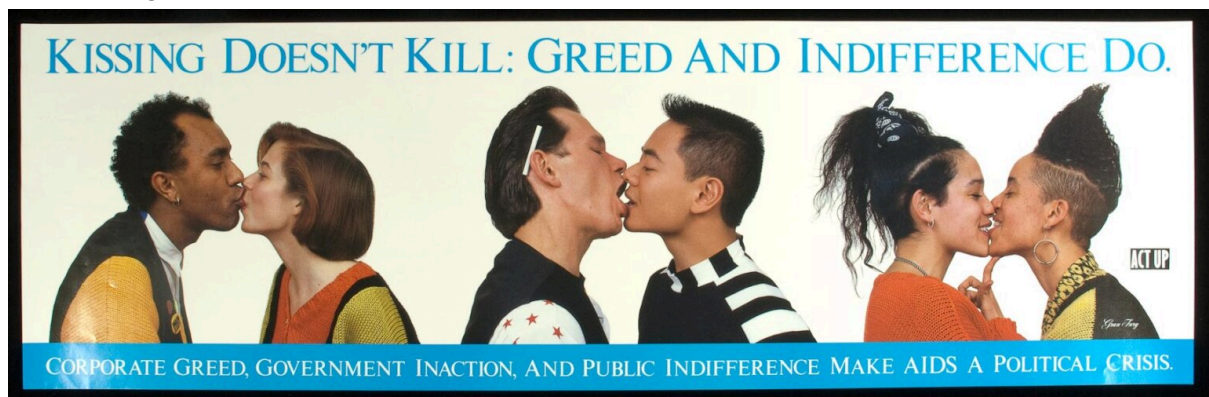
It is “good cop” activism. Instead of raising fear, just model correct use of the tools of protection. There is a need for the warnings of course - and there are good people doing that already.

I want to show how easy and affordable it is to organise in-person fun events where no one gets covid.

A shared covid safe public social space, where an immuno-compromised person can meet someone who lives with a non-masking teenage child.

I would like to make a new poster of masked people having great fun together
“Having fun doesn’t kill people. Greed and indifference do”.

It is echoing this one from the ACT UP AIDS era.



<https://xtramagazine.com/culture/books/aids-posters-up-against-the-wall-213585>

A non-heterosexual couple kissing was a very controversial image in the 80s. In 2023 the controversial image is masked people of all ages having fun together. It contradicts the Western societal stereotype that all masked people are just “living in fear”.

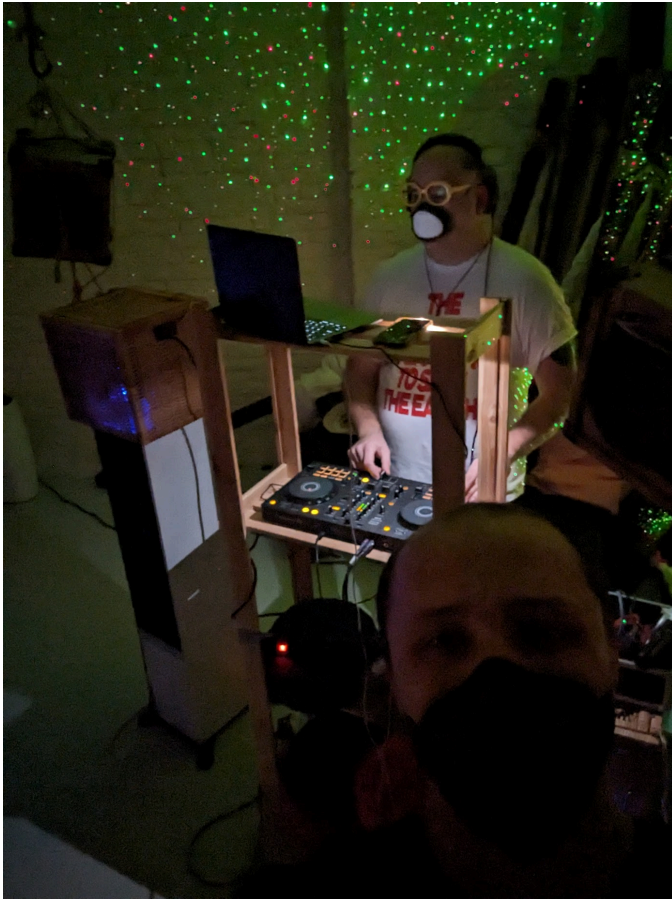
Creating Community

Have you seen the movie “Crip Camp”? It is about the people who pushed for the Americans with Disabilities Act to go through. The story in the movie is that they did all this amazing

activism together because they met as teenagers at a summer camp and carried that high-trust camaraderie throughout their lives.

So meeting together in-person, doing some event organising together creates trust that is needed to build more projects that support the brave new covid-safer world.





Risk Mitigation Measures

Multiple layers

Swiss cheese model of multiple layers of protection - even if there is a mistake at one level, then the risk is still low.

- Far range interaction has three layers
 - Air filtration
 - Tests
 - Mask
- Short distance interaction has two layers
 - Tests
 - Mask

The Kit

- Test kits
 - Rapid Antigen Tests:
 - During a surge of other respiratory viruses, it is best to use a combined rapid test for RSV and Flu and Covid. (We haven't tried it yet, but will do next time)
 - Like Fluorecare in this study is ok for flu A but not really sensitive for RSV
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9970915/>
 - Of course, RAT produce a lot of false positives, so you need to buy the pluslife Flu/RSV cartridges to confirm the positives.
 - If you can get only Covid antigen tests, then these are the brands
 - Best is Citest, then Longsee.
 - It is also ok greenspring or hotgen
- Molecular NAAT



- Many (3-10) pluslife machines connected to a laptop via USB hub for curve monitoring via the [app](#)
- Swab sticks in tubes.
 - It is a little bit more expensive but it is much easier to handle a hundred swabs if they are all in tubes that are labelled
 - FLOQSwab™ flocked nylon swabs
<https://www.praxisdienst.de/Laborbedarf/Traeger/Abstrichbesteck/eNAT+FLO>



[QSwabs+regular+Tip+552C](#)

[.html](#)



- Disposable gloves for doing the test. The test solution is toxic - it is designed to open up the cells and take the genetic material out of them. Protect your hands
- Wristbands
 - To mark people who have passed the test as negative
 - It has two parts - small one and big one



- Scissors to cut off the wristbands
- Post it notes and pens. To mark the test machines and swabs.
- A bin for the testing station biohazard waste
- A table for the testing station





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- Air filters. At least 25 liters per person per second
- Extension cords to connect the air filters.
- Signs for directions on what to do and where to go as people arrive

The Venue

- The waiting/testing area.
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 - Having a Garden is very important. Ideal venue has a garden for testing. Testing takes 40 mins - 1.5 hours depending on when people arrive and how many positive pools need to be broken down. So people spend a lot of time waiting for the test results mulling around in the garden talking, doing the swab, maybe even doing a bitrex mask fit test.
- Indoor space should be easily ventilated. The rented venue is usually used straight until our rental starts, so opening all the windows immediately, putting hepas on turbo in the toilets, small rooms, and everywhere else. And just letting it stay like that empty while people are tested outside.
- Physical barrier. It is important to have a clear physical barrier between the people who tested negative, and others. One easy rule is that indoors is only for people who

tested negative. They are easily identified by a wristband on their hand. A person only gets the wristband after they test negative.

- Toilets. Having a well-ventilated toilet outside is also ideal. Until the person tests negative they can't come in, so if the only toilet is inside that means that one has to be without the toilet for 30 mins to one hour.
- Noise. It would be ideal if the windows could be open while playing music inside - like live music or techno. Unfortunately at our venue we have to close the windows, so we have to bring an extra load of HEPA filters when it is music, compared to when it is just board games with windows open.

The People

- The Swab Handler
 - Greets people as they enter the garden gate and gives them tubes
 - "Here are the swabs, do you want to do it yourself or would you like us to help you?"
 - We collect 2 swabs from each person
 - Throat and mouth and nose swab one into Pluslife pool of 1-3 people immediately. It is ideal if they arrive in groups of 3, but sometimes there are gaps, so we wait or do individual tests, depending on how generous we feel with the kits.
 - Second is also throat and mouth, and goes into the freezer. In case the pool is positive and we need to test people individually. It is much better to just collect it, even if it is not used. It avoids disturbing people unnecessarily - it is a very disturbing experience to be approached by the testing person in the middle of the conversation, being told that you are in a positive pool of N people, and that another swab is needed urgently right now, holding up the whole event. It is much better to avoid this stress, and just take the extra swab and keep it in the freezer.
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 - The Swab Handler writes on all the tubes the number of the wristband, and optionally the name. Some people have the same name, so numbers are better. They tear the small end of the wristband and give this small piece to the swabbed person. The actual wristband is passed to the test station together with the swabs.
 - Self-swabbing is encouraged. It supports body-autonomy and is a great life skill to test oneself. Help is offered though in terms of teaching how to swab or doing the swab on the person, if it is requested by the person themselves.
 - The swab handler wears gloves. They don't change them between people as the swabs are inside the tubes. The people put swabs into the tubes

- One person doing this is usually enough.
- Once the test is negative, the swab handler gives the person green wristband. And also gives them back their 3 swabs. They can keep them for themselves or put in the bin. It is important that the bio material goes back to the person to whom it belongs, including the frozen sample.
- **The Testers**
 - Once the swabs are collected by the Swab Handler, they are handed over to the Test station.
 - The test station runs the pluslife machines and has laptops showing curves. The post-it notes go onto the machines to show the start time, and the numbers of the swabs that are in the pool.
 - If you do the rats, then the RATs only work at the temperature above +15 degrees. So they have to be warm indoors. It also takes a couple of mins for the swab to get warm, if you test out in the cold.
 - Once the Pluslife and RATs are negative, the Tester announces the number and the person comes to collect the wristband. Instead of announcing, you can also project the numbers on a wall with a small projector.
 - This job is ideally done by 3-5 *people*:
 - One running the pluslives
 - One swabbing
 - One giving out negative bands
 - If you don't have a ice box bag, then one running back and forth to the fridge in the kitchen with the samples. This job can be eliminated by having a small ice-box in the test station.
 - If rats, then rat person
- **The Bouncer**
 - Stands on the entrance to indoor space and only allows people with wristbands inside while the testing is going on.
 - It is great to rotate people in this role every 30 mins or so, so the shifts are not very long.
- **The Air officer**
 - One person
 - It is a very fundamental layer of protection, so deserves a separate person. It is not a complicated task but it has to be done and not missed.
 - On check in, open many windows and air the venue from the previous people until co2 drops below 800 according to Aranet
 - Put the air filters around the space. Especially nooks and corners - toilets, upstairs places. Bring a lot of extension cords to distribute the filters. Don't put hepas next to each other - that is not effective.
 - After the initial airing out, close the windows to make the venue warmer
 - During the event, check that co2 doesn't get too high. Setup beeping alarm on aranet for 1200. When it beeps, open a bit the windows, if no music playing
 - At the end, collect all the extension cords. Unplug the filters and coil the cables carefully.

- The Driver
 - We rent air filters for events and they are quite bulky, so having a car, or better a van to pick them up and drive them back after the event is an important task. When the event is over and goes home, this person has to go bring the hepas back - that is the most difficult part.
- The Venue Person
 - Checking in and checking out requires its own checklist.
 - To come early to check-in at the venue.
 - Open all the windows to air out the previous workshop air
 - At the end of the event do the check out. While everyone else is loading the cars and saying goodbye, it is easy to miss out on things.
 - Sweep of mop the floor
 - Put all the furniture and extension cords belonging to the venue to their place
 - Switch off the lights
 - Put all the keys where they should be (I have walked away with garden keys before)
 - Lock the front door and check
- Zoom tester
 - We offer at home testing for people who own a pluslife machine and tests.
 - It is more effort for the organisers as it doesn't scale, but it makes a better experience for participants.
 - Some people have low spoons and can't wait outside in the cold and rain for one hour while the tests are being done.
 - Some people had a recent exposure, and want to be sure that they can definitely get in before they put in all the effort of getting ready.
 - To do zoom testing, you need:
 - We don't do pool testing over zoom. Only one person in the machine. It is because things can go wrong more easily on zoom compared to our test center.
 - The participant shares the screen with the browser opened at pluslife. Machine paired.
 - The participant shows their pluslife machine
 - They show their virus.suck screen that machine is warmed
 - They show the test and we check the expiry date together
 - They show the swab - only floqswabs work
 - They show how they swab. On zoom you can really zoom in - and it is safe, so this aspect is actually much better than irl.
 - Back of throat
 - Under tongue
 - Left cheek
 - Right cheek
 - Left nostril
 - Right nostril
 - Put swab in solution
 - Pour with no bubbles
 - Start the test

- Go on mute, camera off for 35 mins
- Come back and say it is all good - see you at the event.

Event timeline

Ideal timeline for the event that is advertised to start 19:00 on Sunday

Friday or Saturday

The volunteers meet on zoom and go over the distribution of tasks.

Sunday

16:00 pick up the equipment:

- Air filters
- Pluslife machines
- If needed, music equipment

17:30 The core crew meet outside the venue to test on a pluslife that works off a powerbank. They will be inside soon, so it is great to do a pool test to feel safer around each other.

18:15 pool test finishes. Hopefully, all negative. So now we have a crew for the event.

18:30 start the venue setup.

- Open the windows to air the space
- Install the air filters in toilets and other rooms and turn on full.
- Setup the testing room:
 - Start up laptops
 - Start warming up the pluslife machines
 - Get the bins, gloves etc in place

19:00 start accepting people into the garden

We tell everyone: "Please keep your distance. People are not tested. Do not expect that you are in a protected setting."

19:15 this is the most stressful time for testing, as people and swabs keep arriving

19:40 first tests finish running, people receive "negative" wristbands and start going inside

- Close most of the windows, start heating up the indoor space

20:30 all tests finish. Most of the people are inside. Can start the music, play board games, or whatever activity we have planned

22:30 start packing up

23:00 leave the venue

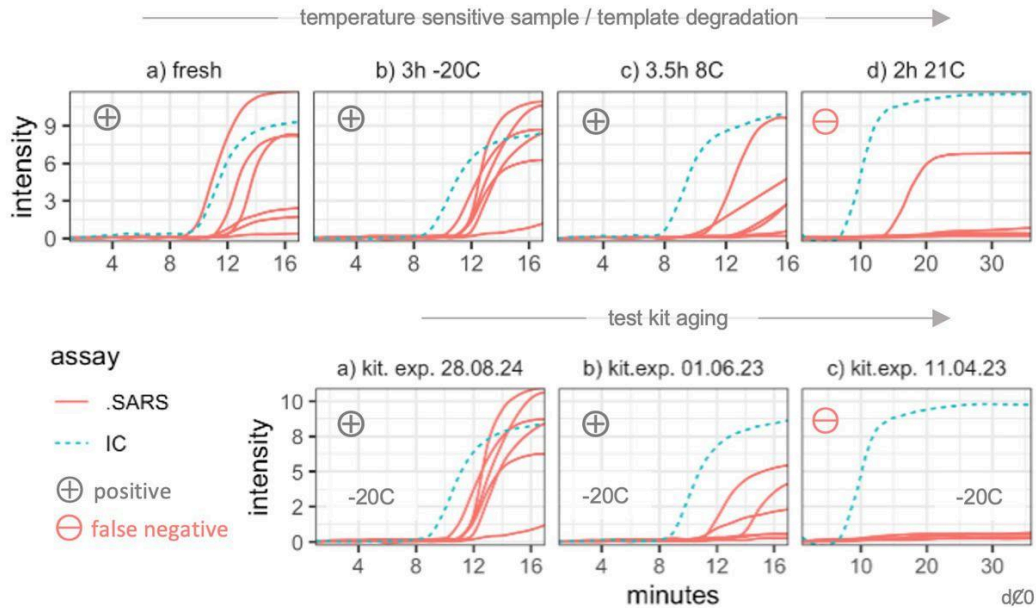
The Finer Details

Keeping a swab in the freezer.



We keep an extra swab in the freezer from each person in case we need to break a positive pool. We don't want to disturb anyone with "potentially positive" news unnecessarily.

The raw swab is still ok to use after 2 hours in the fridge when it is sealed in a plastic tube. See the top row of this graph courtesy of DrC.



Why we used to do a RAT in addition to Pluslife

We don't do RATs anymore as we have never seen a positive RAT in 6 months of running an events. But in the past we did it for these reasons.

It is about human errors in the process. Of course, if pluslife is used correctly there is no need for RAT, but errors happen.

Out of thousands of correct Pluslife tests, I heard two reports of negative pluslife tests while having simultaneously positive RAT. And 4 hours later having positive pluslife, so it wasn't just a false positive. I want to do something based on this information.

Examples of human error in Pluslife process:

- Using buffer solution from one batch with a test cartridge from another batch. This can disable the test
- Incorrectly labelling nose swab as a throat swab. If nose swab is used for pluslife test, then we can't do early detection. Virus in the nose is about a day later than the throat according to Imperial College Human Challenge study
- If a positive pool has two positives in it. When breaking a positive pool, one sample is mislabelled or taken with a wrong number. In that case we will only find the one positive in it, and not the second one.
- The person doing pluslife pool testing writing a wrong number on the post it note, and if the pool is positive then only one positive in the pool is found on individual test, not the other ones.

- Some mistake at Pluslife factory causing them to later issue a recall.

The extra benefit of using a RAT is that we can easily add RATs for Flu and RSV during their surges. And then check them later with pluslife Flu/RSV tests.

Waiting for the test results

What to do while waiting for test results? It is 1-2 hours outside in the cold and dark. Maybe with rain on top.

Someone would like to give their swab, and then leave the area, go for a long walk alone, to avoid being around potentially positive people.

Or someone with a different risk assessment, would like to talk to masked people outside.

It is hard to make a rational decision here because you are just stepping into being around masked people and feel warm and fuzzy inside...

It is important that the organisers communicate that positive people might be around in the testing area. The swab handler will announce it to everyone as they take swabs.

There might be a shining neon red triangle sign "Danger: Positive People Possible" :)

How to tell people that their test result is ready?

There is plenty of choices:

- Put the number in a shared read-only online doc
- Come and find them based on the wristband or name
- Call their phone number

For positive results, see a separate section. That is a very delicate matter.

Pluslife vs PCR

- [Pluslife](#) has very cheap Covid test cartridges. Around 8 euros. And if you pool 3 people, that still gives good results. So 2.5 euros per person - almost the price of a RAT!
 - Compared to a PCR machine like Egens RT-PCR it is a standardised, easy to use procedure. You don't need to do pipetting.
 - The issue with PCR is that you have to wait until all the samples are collected to start the 45 minute run. Pluslife on the other hand is ok to run it with just one test. People always arrive at different times, so not having to wait till everyone is there, and starting to test them as early as possible is an advantage.

Air Filtration



The venue we rent is in a residential area so in order to play music or be loud inside, we need to close all the windows. That means that we don't rely on ventilation, but only on filtration.

I am not entirely clear on what I should use to calculate a good level of ventilation - air changes per hour or litres per second per person.

To get the ASHRAE recommended 25 litres per second per person for 15 people, I only need 1350 m³ per hour. However the space is 450m³ so that volume of filtration gives only 2.1 air changes per hour, below the 5-10 needed by WHO.

I have enough filters to produce 6 air changes per hour in this space but that is a van to transport them and effort to carry them. Would appreciate advice from a ventilation expert.

Links:

<https://itsairborne.com/ashrae-241-control-of-infectious-aerosols-part-2-equivalent-clean-airflow-rates-76a511769d4d>

Mask Fit Testing

Best party game is to fit test your mask! Bring a bitrex solution, vaporizer, many different people bring many different masks. Hours of fun in the garden with a paper bag on your head.

I am still trying to find a person with a condensing particle counter machine in Berlin to come and offer proper fit testing, but Bitrex is the best we can do for now.

When someone tests positive

Unfortunately it is very easy to get a false positive rapid test. If it happens, we run individual pluslife for this person, not just the pool. One volunteer approaches that person and says "Let's go a bit aside privately away from others. We had a positive RAT for your swab. We are running a validation experiment. in 20 minutes we will tell you for sure."

If the positive test is confirmed. It is important to avoid naming publicly the confirmed positive person, to not stigmatise them.

Just announce publicly "One person tested positive and they have now left the venue."

It makes everyone nervous. That is why in the garden we tell everyone: "Please keep your distance. People are not tested. Do not expect that you are in a protected setting. Keep wearing your mask and stay outside."

The Content

Event Themes

COVIDing is such a horizontal cut through society - different activities attract different people. It is great to rotate every month - quiet board games, loud techno, live music, stand up, playfight, sex party, emotional sharing. Each one attracts a different crowd.

Conflicting access needs

Some people don't want to be around other people who have a cough or a runny nose, even when these symptoms are not contagious - for example allergies or a chronic illness. That is a conflicting access need.

The solution that I try to find is to alternate rules between events. This time we have live music where people with chronic conditions are prioritised. Next time when we have live music, it will be for “only people without respiratory symptoms” and prioritise the immunocompromised.

So I alternate between these rules

A) Self-screening for symptoms of a contagious illness. Only come if you do not have any signs of contagious illness (COVID or otherwise), that aren't fully explained by a non-contagious health condition that you have.

B) Self-screening for symptoms of a contagious illness. Only come if you do not have any signs of contagious illness (COVID or otherwise). This time it applies even if they are fully explained by a non-contagious health condition that you have. This is to accommodate the immuno-compromised participants. Our next event on this theme will include people with chronic conditions. It is how we are working with this conflicting access need.

Feedback forms and post-event infection survey

5 days after the event, the feedback forms go out to participants. First goal is to check if anyone became infected. (Idea borrowed from [WisCon conference](#)) We need to track how effective our mitigation policies actually are.

And secondly is to ask how the event can be improved - what went well and what not so well.

Here is a recent survey: <https://form.jotform.com/240191828112046>

Covid Safe Techno Party Infection Survey & Feedback Form

14 Jan 2024

Did you contract any infection at the event? Covid, Flu, RSV or any other? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, please provide more details. It will allow us to make future events more safe.

How would you rate the Covid Safe Techno Party #2?



Would you come to another event?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

What did you enjoy about the party?

What would you change?

New Incoming Suggestions

Someone gave me some awesome suggestions for the next event.

Inform people that they should be prepared for 1-2 hours in the cold (bring gloves, hat, scarf).

Offer people something nice, e.g. that they can bring a hot water bottle that you can fill with hot water on site (you can make hot water in the kitchen and then take it outside in thermos flasks)

Prepare mulled wine and tea. Announce that there will be mulled wine and tea as soon as the testing is finished.

Further preparation:

Laminate signage (arrows)

and/or fairy lights (2 for paths, other color/colorful for delimiting the waiting area)

Wristband for PCR tests, 1 color; label with individual code, e.g. numbered PCR_131223/01
(=> code for PCR station, date/number 01)

Wristband for rapid test, 1 other color: with the same code but RT_131223/01

Radiant heater for rapid test station to keep tests at temperature (test beforehand whether heat is sufficient!)

2 chalkboards (1x PCR station, 1x rapid test station)

Make signs with laminated arrows or use fairy lights (1x left and 1x right) to show the way.

>> Make one or two people from the "bouncer" to welcome those arriving. One person can offer hot water for the hot water bottles and / or fill them immediately, the other gives swabs to the arrivals and briefly explains the way: Simply follow the route and hand in the swab at the PCR station (guest gets 1st wristband with code PCR.../01) and continues directly to station 2 (rapid test station). Gives swab, receives the other wristband RT_.../01 and then continues from there to the waiting area, where there may be mulled wine/tea, for example.

If 1 PCR test / rapid test is negative, the person testing writes the code on the board. The guest goes there, the ribbon is stamped, the guest goes back to the waiting area. Same procedure for PCR, but the rapid test wristband is cut off. Only the PCR wristband remains and the person can enter the location.